



Clear Thinking Issue 100

Just a quick reminder that the 25% early bird discount for our next online training course 'Learn how to lift depression quickly (and enjoy it!)' expires on 17 August. The course starts on 7th September - for more information and to book, please click [here](#).

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How to get self affirmations to work for you

4 steps to help clients boost their willpower – by Mark Tyrrell

“Every day in every way I’m getting better and better!”

But am I? (No need to answer that!)

Self affirmations were first popularized by French psychologist Emile Coué back in the 1920s and are still a staple of self help gurus and pop psychologists everywhere (1). But do they work?

Well, yes and no. Canadian researchers (2) found that using self affirmations if you’ve *already* got low self esteem can make you feel worse.

Repeating to yourself “I am a lovable person” works well *if you already believe that*. But for those with genuine low self esteem, a self affirmation can backfire because it just feels like you are lying to yourself. Nothing affirming about that.

Focusing repeatedly on what you believe you are *not* can remind you of what you think you *are*. The researchers found that the people who really needed to feel good about themselves were the very ones who felt worse after using self positive self statements. Why so?

People base their feelings about themselves on real evidence from their lives. Identifying what you really believe are your core strengths and habitually reminding yourself of them can be a great way to boost a positive intention and feeling. But the point is, you have to believe *to start with*.

Hypnosis, when used well, can help people feel as if they *have* experienced being strong or calm in a situation. This is more convincing to them than just saying the words, so is more likely to be assimilated into a better sense of self.

Your clients are more likely to believe positive self affirmations if their life is already working for them; if they have good friends, close family ties, satisfying work and are meeting all the other basic needs that we know make people happy (3).

Does this mean that self affirmations are really only good for helping people who are already basically okay feel even better? Not at all.

A time and a place for affirmations

Although using self affirmations to boost self esteem can be counter productive, what about using self affirmations in a different context? How about when we need to boost will power? Will power and self control are akin to the Holy Grail when it comes to personal success and fulfillment (4).

And now it turns out that, when you feel weak, just stating your core values can be a quick and easy self-control booster (5).

The researchers who discovered this surmise that focusing on our core values snaps us out of the trancelike state that impulsiveness puts us into. When we feel impulsive, we have stopped 'thinking' and act on emotionally driven instinct.

Anything that breaks through the impulse trance that has us putting our paws in the cookie jar without even noticing how we got there can help us take back the reins of our behaviour.

So when you're feeling impelled to watch TV instead of getting on with writing your novel, saying aloud (or in your head), "Determination is important to me!" can actually boost your will power. But only if determination really *is* important to you.

When you want to help your clients with impulse control, you can put this research to good use by helping them identify their core values and teaching them how to deploy them.

Here are the four steps to helping clients ramp up their will power.

1) Ask your client about their core values

If they're uncertain, suggest some – things like

- honesty
- decency
- self control
- determination
- bravery
- kindness
- etc...

Find out what is important to *them*.

2) Identify the weakness trigger points

Impulses are rarely random. Like everything else in life, there will be a pattern to them, which you can identify.

For example:

- mid-morning break – time for a cigarette
- hard day at work – out with the bottle of wine
- spot of rain – no exercise today
- and so on.

3) Create an affirmation

Get your client to create an affirmation that encapsulates the core value that they think will be most effective for their particular trigger points.

For example:

- “I believe in using my time well”
- “Honesty is a very important quality”
- “Self restraint is a sign of maturity”.

If, as the researchers suggest, core value self-affirmations work because they quickly switch the mind from emotive self focus to a more abstract, detached, ‘bigger picture’, then – paradoxically – *the more general and less self referential the affirmation is the better.*

So rather than

“I am determined and powerful”

go for something like

“Determination is important to me because it makes for powerful living!”

4) Hypnotically rehearse using affirmation for self control

Get your client to hypnotically rehearse being in times when their will power may weaken, and then focussing on their core value and their chosen affirmation.

The researchers found that our ability to exercise self control on its own can become depleted and exhausted the more we use it. But stating core values quickly replenishes the reserves.

Try it yourself: Next time you feel will power ebbing away, consciously focus on your strengths and core values, what you take pride in and what you feel is important in human beings.

Notes

(1) 150 years ago the very aptly named Victorian writer Samuel Smiles wrote a best selling book entitled *Self Help*, which gave us the phrase “God helps those who help themselves.”

(2) Canadian researchers found those with low self-esteem felt worse after repeating positive statements about themselves. They found that phrases such as “I am a lovable person” only helped people with high self-esteem, and then only slightly. The psychologists then asked study participants to list negative and positive thoughts about themselves. They found that, paradoxically, those with low self-esteem were in a better mood when they were allowed to have negative thoughts than when they were asked to focus exclusively on affirmative thoughts. The study appears in the *Journal*

Psychological Science.

(3) No research has yet shown that low self esteem can be corrected purely through using 'positive self-speak'.

(4) Researchers who conducted the famous 'marshmallow test' on four-year-olds in which ability to delay gratification was measured found in long term follow up of the subjects that the children who could exercise will power tended to be happier, more fulfilled and more personally and financially successful in their adult lives than their weaker-willed counterparts. Mischel, W. (1968). *Personality and assessment*. New York: Wiley.

(5) Schmeichel and Vohs (2009), 'Self-affirmation and self-control: affirming core values counteracts ego depletion', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

How to stop anyone smoking

So can you use affirmations to help your clients who want to quit smoking?

You bet you can!

Effective self affirmation is one of the many powerful techniques you can master on our [how to stop anyone smoking online course](#). It's very important to equip people who want to become non-smokers to deal effectively with the inevitable times of temptation when they feel their will-power unequal to the task. And to deal effectively with any times when they might relapse so that they quickly get back on track.

Though we must also point out that another important skill you will learn on this course is how to make relapse extremely unlikely!

There are only 25 places on each of our courses, and a juicy Early Bird Discount is waiting for you, so it's a good idea to sign up right now for the next course which starts on Wednesday 3 November.

And you do know you can dial in from anywhere in the world, don't you?

[Read more on the how to stop anyone smoking course here.](#)

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell

Co-Founder

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